

All Signs Point To A New Version Of Zab Judah, Humbled, And More Mature

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 14 July 2010 19:00

Any and all involved with comebacking Zab Judah were wary. The kid had talked the talk before, said hed learned his lesson, was smarter, was working harder. But theyd been burned before, saw things, read things, heard things.

That fracas in the April 2006 Mayweather fight, initiated by Judah via a low blow and a behind the head strike, and the year-long suspension. What about that May 31, 2008 fight against Shane Mosley, which was canceled when, as Dan Rafael reported, Judah got angry at his dad, Yoel, and punched a glass shower door, necessitating 50 stitches on his right arm. He found trouble, or trouble found him, too often. In August 2006, three guys tried to rob Zab in NYC. He was next to his Lamborghini at 5 AM in Chelsea, and armed thugs wanted his jewelry. He bolted, they bolted, and they were arrested. A month before, Zab had been arrested after a charity hoops game at MSG for non-payment of child support.

Too much news, too little of it to do with boxing.

But consider this...we havent been hearing about legal woes, and street fights, and the like for awhile now, have we? So...is it possible that at 32, Zab Judah, like so many of us with a case of arrested development, of an extended adolescence, has grown up?

Kathy Duva cast a wary eye when Judah, earlier this year, came to her Main Events office, hat in hand. Zab has been tight for over a decade with Jolene Mizzone, a ME honcho who rose up from secretary, and now is knee-deep in fighter relations and matchmaking. Even after Judah split Main Events in 2002, and there were legal threats, and settlements in play, Zab and Jolene talked. Duva needed to know that Judah was serious, wasnt going to be in one and done mode, wasnt just looking to get that one megafight, one lottery ticket hit, and then go AWOL.

She needed to know that he was on board, fully, deeply, unconditionally.

She needed to know that hed be open to listening, to maybe leave some pie on the plate, and maybe fight on a Friday Night Fights, for less dough, in exchange for getting back on our radar.

Duva needed to know that hed buy into her plan, masterfully executed with Pole Tomasz Adamek, which would build him up as an attraction in Newark, NJ, just across the river from his beloved Brooklyn.

Would Zab, Duva wondered, trust her, let her and her crew help him build a name back up, fight a guy like Jose Armando Santa Cruz, tough but not a superstar, then if he looks solid, step up incrementally?

Would he take his role in his career more seriously, and actually put in the hard work, the shoe leather time, as a co-promoter?

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Would he, if Main Events and Judah got back together, show up for press conferences, and promotional events, on time?

So far, so good, Duva tells TSS. Everything we have asked of him, he has done, she told us.

So hes been cooperative, and eager to do the right thing. We now need to know if he can still fight. We will see tomorrow night, when the new, improved, humbled Judah, now seeking to to make noise and money at 140 pounds after floundering as a welterweight, gloves up in Newark. Doors open at 7 pm. The first bout is scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m. The show will be broadcast live on ESPN2 beginning at 9 pm. Tickets priced at \$53, \$78, \$103 and \$203 (ringside) can be purchased at Prudential Center Box Office, by calling TicketMaster at 800-745-3000 or at www.Prucenter.com. TSS-EM will file live.

Judah is still cutting weight, getting acclimated to 140, where he fought from 1996-2003. Hell weigh 141 versus Santa Cruz, who will present a tall, slowish 143 pound target for the speedier Judah. We may see a bit of a refurbished model, because Zab has been working with trainer Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, the ex light heavyweight tilist who grew up with and ran with Zabs dad Yoel in Brownsville, the outer borough mecca which bred Mike Tyson, Muhammad, Riddick Bowe, Shannon Briggs etc. Muhammad wont be in the corner, as hell be in Ishe Smiths corner in a ShoBox fight against Fernando Guerrero at that time. But the mere fact that Judah and company reached out to Muhammad is promising for those hoping Zab enjoys a career uptick, and lives down his label as an unfulfilled talent.

Adding Eddie as co-trainer, hes another great person added to Team Judah. Its great to be back with Main Events, who I started my career with, Judah told TSS. Kathy and all them are my friends. People have been asking for the old Judah and hes back. Im more focused. Its all good.

He admitted hed been too easily distracted in the past, but said that was history. 140 pounds, he feels, is where he belongs, where his body is best. Don King, he said, suggested he go to 147 to fight Cory Spinks, and Zab did, and then hung in that class, through losses to Baldomir, Mayweather, Cotto and Clottey. But at 140, his speed and power stand out more, and he thinks he will be able to show the youngs guns, like Khan, Maidana, Bradley and Alexander that he is no spent shell.

These guys are champions, and if Im going to be in it, Im going to be in it to win it, he said. (TSS U, feel free to leave a comment for Zab on who you think he should aim for.)

Judah has said money isnt his motivation, but he did admit that hed like to taste some of those paychecks that Mayweather, Pacquiao and Mosley have been enjoying, while insinuating that he is at their level as a talent. I gave Mayweather his toughest fight, the fighter said, and hes the pound for pound best.

No, he said, he doesnt look back and ache with regret: Id never change anything. If I changed things then I wouldnt be the person who I am today.

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Duva has checked out that person, and is impressed. Shes seen Zab dotting on his son, and thinks that speaks well for a solid run to renewed prominence in the sport. She sees Zab fitting in well, on HBO or Showtime, with all those names at 140. If he gets past Santa Cruz, Duva told TSS, shed like to book Judah back in Newark in October. That could be a big name fight, or, if the right person and terms arent hashed out, someone maybe a step above Santa Cruz. Remember, Duva isnt one of these make-a-fast-buck promoters. Shes held out, and let Tomasz Adamek get seasoning at heavyweight, and watched as the pot to have him fight a Klitschko rises, from one-to-two-to-three million. Shes been patient, and shes willing to be patient with Judah, too, if he keeps on buying in. Zab is the only marquee name among all those young guns and Id think theyd have to come to him, she said. Zab knows he has one shot left, that he cant hook up with the wrong outfit. He has matured, it is very obvious to those around him.

Muhammad agrees. He got married, he has a child, that humbles a person, the trainer said. EMM said they all work out in the same gym, and the Judahs like what hes done with Chad Dawson. So Yoel came to Eddie, and suggested a hookup. Hey, a fellow Brooklynite asks you, you say, Im ready, willing and able.

Im supposed to be purely objective, right? Not show my cards? Have no rooting interest? Nonsense. Ill be happy if indeed this new Judah is here to stay. Happy for boxing, which can always use athletes who stay out of the police file. Happy for his wife, son, and hopefully his other kids, who will get to see their dad doing the right thing, being there for them, being a good citizen.

SPEEDBAG Duva said that Adamek-Michael Grant is still on. The Pole and the 37-year-old, 6-7 hitter Grant, will battle at the Pru Center. Duva said Adamek has requested more time to get a sense of the height and weight of the folks hell be fighting in the heavyweight division, so the long and tall Grant, roughly Klitschko sized, makes sense. Grant, who was kayoed by Lennox Lewis in his 2000 title shot, and by Jameel McCline in his next outing, hasnt been firmly engaged in the sport since then. But his people say he recognizes that his window is nearly shut, and he needs a big name win to get back into a title picture. Duvas take: Wed prefer for Tomasz to fight David Haye, thats more of a pick em fight. Would Haye duck Adamek? Its another cruiserweight, whats he afraid of? But Tomasz will fight him or one of the Klitschkos next year.